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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic project to develop a model for an ethnic studies program based on community education, community involvement, and a study of community history is described. The project took place in New Harmony, Indiana, a town of 600-700 persons with a strong European heritage, especially German. Part of the project staff was selected from the community, and an advisory council comprised 14 representatives from community businesses, institutions, agencies, and the general population. Project staff identified, collected, and developed German ethnic heritage materials relevant to New Harmony for secondary schools, teacher education programs, and community education programs. Activities included German language and culture classes for adults and secondary school students, community programs on German arts, exchange of students to and from Iptingen, Germany, and special programs for service and social clubs. Several insights into uses and problems of ethnography in curriculum development were gained. First, superficial consultation with community leaders who lead curricularists to think they know the community and have sufficiently involved the community will result in a curriculum that lacks relevance and goals that appear unimportant or ill-directed. Also, the incorporation of ethnography into the curriculum is itself an approach to ethnic awareness as students learn the skill of learning from others. (KC)

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EXPLORING SETTINGS AS SOURCE FOR GLOBAL/COMMUNITY CURRICULUM

Contributions of Ethnographic Research to Curriculum: New Harmony, IN

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American Educational Research Association
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ABSTRACT

Contributions of Ethnographic Research to
Curriculum: New Harmony, IN

by Norman V. Overly

The paper presents a very brief overview of some aspects of a Title XI Ethnic Heritage Studies project and the relationship of insights gained from that project and ethnographic methodolcgy as tools for curriculum research as a basis for improved curriculum development. The community context is set, the people involved in the process are identified and the definition of ethnicity is related to the process of developing global awareness. Finally, the community study and community involvement techniques used in model building for ethnic heritage programs are reviewed in terms of ethnographic methodology and its relevance to the various areas of curricularist endeavors.

A sine qua non for informed curriculum developers for at least a half century has been involvement of the community, as well as student, parent and classroom teacher, in the process of curriculum development. And yet, seldom have we reflected on the implications or probable consequences of such involvement. The positive value of such cooperation has been widely assumed. It seems both fair and reasonable to involve the "public" since the focus of a major portion of education in a democratic society is the public school system. My work in New Harmony, Indiana was built on such an unexamined assumption. As is frequently the case in research and development projects, the new understandings that resulted were unanticipated and cause for additional reflection and study beyond the testing of the model produced as a result of the project.

The project upon which these reflections and research are based was a Title XI, USOE funded research and development effort entitled, "A Community-Based Model for Development of Ethnic Heritage Studies Programs". The primary purpose of the project was to develop a model that would be useable in communities through out the United States in local efforts to address the social issue of lack of ethnic awareness resulting in cultural insensitivity and parochial narrowness within local, state, national and global contexts. The study combined aspects of community education, curriculum development, and a study of community history. It grew out of a conviction that the majority of American citizens, especially those in small towns and rural settings, have

difficulty comprehending and appreciating the ethnic diversity of the United States, not to mention the world. For many, cultural diversity is an unwanted intrusion and has an "other world" quality that is less urgent and real than walks on the moon and Star Wars.

While the proposal for the study grandly envisioned being able to speak to any and all communities, monolithic and diverse, large and small, the results of our efforts are supportive of much that Paul M. Nachtigal has reported in his NIE commissioned publication, Rural Education: In Search of a Better Way.

"(R)ural communities differ from urban communities in a number of significant ways and . . . there exists a rich diversity among rural communities that adds to the complexity of developing public policy for rural America."[1] Certainly my experience with New Harmony, Indiana supports Nachtigal's conclusion. This is not to be unexpected since New Harmony was selected in part because it was a unique rural setting that held promise for allowing me to complete the project within the one year time frame set by terms of the funding contract.

Community Context

Since New Harmony, Indiana may be unfamiliar to many, a sketch of the setting of the study will be helpful. New Harmony is a small town with 600-700 residents located in the southwest corner of Indiana, on the banks of the Wabash River that separates Indiana from Illinois. It is a rural town, removed from the hustle and bustle of urban centers. The flat countryside has rich soil usually providing a bountiful harvest of corn, soybeans and melons and supporting moderate-sized farms for

beef cattle and hogs. The roads of the town have recently been subjected to the shock and weight of heavy coal trucks and oil riggings that move back and forth across the river to an Ohio River port at Mt. Vernon, Indiana, a few miles to the south. The other major travel through the town is that of tourists who seek out the community for its historical significance.

It was the first ten years of New Harmony's utopian existence as a haven for the German religious community called the Harmonists, upon which the curriculum portion of the study focused. From the time of its founding in 1814 until the latter part of the twentieth century, farming has been critical to New Harmony's existence. However, it has not been only a quiet little farming community.

New Harmony has played an important role in the life and times of Indiana and the United States out of proportion to its size and location. After its first ten years as a homogenous religious community of some 800 members with a controlled life style, it was replaced by a second utopian experiment built upon the ideas of the Welch-Scottish pioneer industrialist, Robert Owen. Father Rapp, leader of the Harmonists, sold the town, lock, stock and barrel, to Owen and moved his people back to Pennsylvania, just ten years after he undertook to build the town.

In recent years, several groups of enterprising citizens have undertaken major efforts to recapture some of the lost glory of New Harmony and share it with the wider public. To this end Historic

New Harmony Inc., New Harmony Associates, and the New Harmony State Memorial have cooperated and competed in reclaiming buildings, preparing museum exhibits, fostering community projects, and making a significant contribution to the life of the town, the broader geographical region, and the State of Indiana. Many of the supporters of historic reclamation and development have come from outside the community. They include state officials, university related personnel, teachers living in other communities and private citizens who have moved there from urban centers such as Chicago, Indianapolis, Houston and Evansville.

The town has its own school, one of the smallest in the State of Indiana. It is a focal point of community activity and draws together a more diverse clientele than the citizen groups that have supported the historic renovations and development.

Even with the influx of new blood, the ethnic identity of the town and surrounding area is overwhelmingly European. Well into the twentieth century Blacks were not permitted to sleep in town, even when they were brought there to perform in a variety of cultural events at the local Opera House. The surrounding area is heavily of German heritage as are many parts of Southern Indiana, but New Harmony itself is not clearly of a single ethnic heritage. While evidence of various ethnic differences are visible, the predominant WASP culture is accepted as the norm. Few students in the schools were aware of their particular ethnic backgrounds at the time the project began.

Practically none recognized any German heritage, even though a few had names of recognizable German origin. They simply saw themselves as "Americans", assuming that most of the world was like them and Southern Indiana. Not only were they unaware of the meaning of ethnicity and cultural diversity and its impact on their community and in their own lives, they were usually untouched by the rich resources of the community and the growing commercial interest in the development of the resources. In fact, there was more than a little antagonism toward tourism and having the town an object of outside interest.

People in the Process

When the population of a total community, including the surrounding farms that support it and make up its political, social and environmental setting, is 600-700 individuals it may appear possible to move in and out fairly quickly and to get a clear understanding of the community in a short time. But if ethnographic studies have taught us nothing else, they have made clear to educators the gross oversimplification of efforts to date at incorporating community input into curriculum decision making. The small town is unbelieveably complex. New Harmony, Indiana may be more complex than most becuase of its historical significance and the external attention it has received. In no way was the New Harmony story merely a matter of the community's history being so significant that the community had no choice in what it would become or how it would be perceived. There is a continuing conflict within the community as to whether

or not its history should dictate life in the town today. The independent diversity of perspective is reflected in the social habits of the residents. The farmers and local workers go the the Sass and Poss and the Main Street Cafe; tourists and "community leaders" are more apt to be found in the Yellow Tavern, the Green Room, the May Fair Bar or the Red Geranium -- all are local watering spots with differing menus, differing drink lists and differing clientele.

The town folk are clearly divisible into a number of different categories. Community interest and concern for "urban" renewal and development of cultural tourism is championed by recent arrivals or returnees who bring with them the mantel of Owenite diversity and intellectual curiosity enriched by exposure to large cities and the cultures of other nations. They are the most recent immigrants and most forceful leaders in the community.

The teachers, few of whom are from New Harmony or reside there, the tourists and visiting students, dignitaries and exchange teachers from Germany, the local students caught in the middle of the action, various advisory committees and supporting groups (heavily peopled by state officials, regional philanthropists and curious academics), plus the project staff, made a curious and potentially volatile mix of people with whom to work.

When one seeks community involvement where is one to begin? What limits should be set? All strata of the community were involved to some extent in this project. But not surprisingly, there was a heavy disproportion of "community leaders and image builders". The

voice of the laborer, student, and even the teachers, was muted by the initial design of the study and the accidents of relationships unrelated to the immediate setting.

Added to the press of the present complex situation in the community were a host of ghosts from past eras that had to be heard since their writings and writings about them continue to have a profound impact -- physically, intellectually, culturally and psychologically -- on those who live there.

Curriculum from the Community

A secondary objective of the New Harmony program was the identification, collection and development of German ethnic heritage materials for use in secondary schools, teacher education programs and community educational programs. However, the emphasis was on the process of developing prototypic materials relevant to the community as opposed to the standard position taken in nearly all other Ethnic Heritage Studies Programs that were designed to develop materials about specific ethnic groups that could be used in any setting. While some of the materials produced in this project may be adopted to other contexts or communities, they were designed with the specific New Harmony situation in mind as illustrations of <u>types</u> of curriculum and the <u>types</u> of resources that might be developed in other local communities interested in following the model.

Developing a curriculum that involves the community and is for the community as well as the public schools presents some unique problems. If the community is heavily involved, the school personnel

feel slighted and vice versa. If more school personnel had been locally based some of the problems might have been overcome. but the problems of ownership of ideas and responsibility for curriculum development are sensitive flash points. Furthermore. the community's view of what is desirable may vary significantly from the school's view since the adults within the community are free agents in the learn ng equation. Public school students are coerced by the compulsive requirements of schooling. This condition presents the curriculum planner with very different expectations and objectives.

Ethnicity and Global Education

The concept of ethnicity used in this study was that of Longstreet with an emphasis on the centrality of the individual perspective.[2] Longstreet's definition suggests that the individual's ethnic perception and identification creeps up on one and catches him or her unaware. Thus, it is not uncommon for us to be blind to our own ethnic characteristics and biases until they are pointed out to us. This means that we must develop personal awareness of ourselves as ethnics as well as being able to see others as ethnics. Then at another level we must move beyond awareness to empathy and appreciation and acceptance. The exact order in which individuals develop sensitivity to and appreciation of ethnic diversity is not clear. This project functioned from an assumption that the widest awareness and deepest understanding were desirable ends. but that incremental changes were realistic expectations. Futhermore. it was assumed that learners could be led from a recognition of their own ethnicity

to a recognition of a community's ethnicity and its implications for living in an ethnically diverse and interdependent world.

There are at least two clearly defined stages on this Chautauqua, the stage of perception and the stage of action. The Perceptive Stage includes sub- stages of awareness. interest. understanding and empathy. These ideas have been developed more fully by Robert Hanvey in his consideration of global awareness and understanding.[3] The Active Stage includes encounters outside one's own ethnic group in chance and planned contexts. cross-ethnic communication in chance and planned contexts. adoption of bicultural mobility. and resocialization to a new ethnic perspective and abandonment of the original position.[4] These ideas have been developed by Banks in his consideration of multiethnic education.

This sketchily establishes the setting within which the study took place.

Methodology of the New Harmony Study

The methodology followed in developing data for model building included selection of a community and immersion of the staff in the community and in the process of developing an awareness of the community's ethnic heritage. Consideration was also given to the impact of the community's heritage and the process of developing an understanding of ethnicity on curricula and on the lives of those in the community today. At another level we viewed and reviewed ourselves as participants in the action.

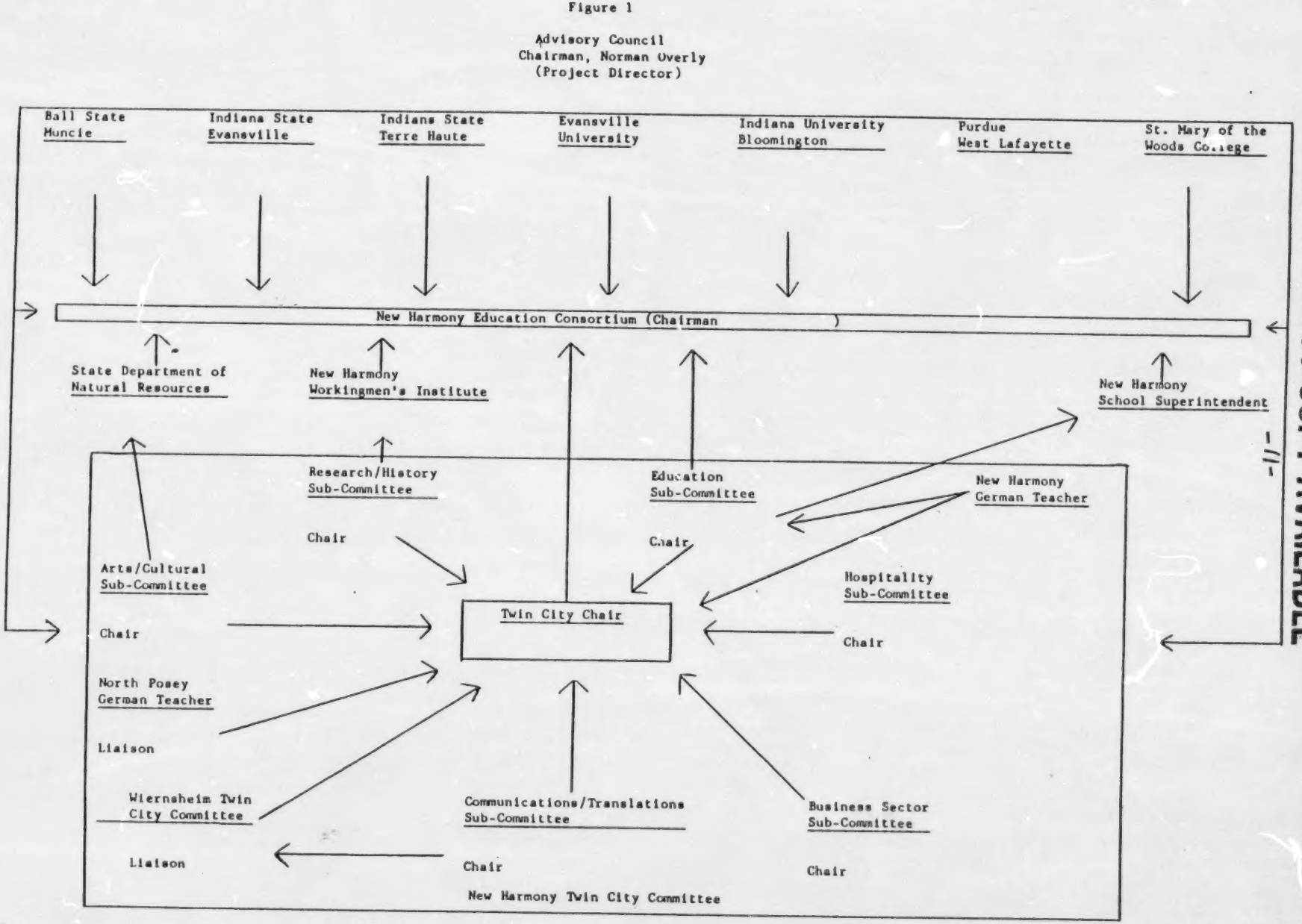
As broad a level of community involvement as possible was sought.

Part of the project staff was selected from the community. In keeping with mandated guidelines for Ethnic Heritage Study projects. an advisory council was formed which represented seven universities. three community educational institutions, and eleven other elements of the community including business, education, recreation, art, communications, international cooperation, historical research, and hospitality. (See Figure 1-- 25 served on that committee.) The community group was bound together as principals in a Twin City Project of information and citizen exchange between New Harmony and Iptingen-Wiersheim in West Germany. Iptingen is the town from which Father Rapp, the founder of New Harmony, and his followers fled religious persecution at the beginning of the 19th century.

Project activities were conducted on two sites. New Harmony and Indiana University at Bloomington. In Bloomington library research, curruculum development and staff support activities were pursued. The illustrative curriculum materials were made available to teachers and community leaders in New Harmony for review, critique, or use as they saw fit. Training sessions (familiarizing sessions) were held. In New Harmony the Twin City committee linking New Harmony with Iptingen, Germany and the school pursed their activities and the project administrative assistant encouraged individuals and groups to participate in a wide variety of mini-projects and activities related to development of an awareness of New Harmony's German ethnic heritage. These included:

1. German language and culture classes for adults, using materials developed by the staff.

Figure 1



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2. German classes in the secondary school.

3. Community programs of German architecture, music, arts, etc.

4. Exchange of students between Iptingen and New Harmony.

5. Articles in the local papers on programs and visitors.

6. Special programs for service and social clubs.

7. Simulation and cultural sensitivity sessions with parents and their children who were to serve as host families.

We attempted not to be in the position of studying the community from the outside or making it an object to be dissected and exhibited. Some citizens made it very clear that they did not want to be used in that way. There was a constant effort on the part of the project team to act in a manner which would serve the interests of the community.

Major group and individual staff relationships were closely intertwined with the project director prociding the main liaison and continuity between sites. (Figure 2 illustrates the relationships).

The Community and Ethnographic Tools

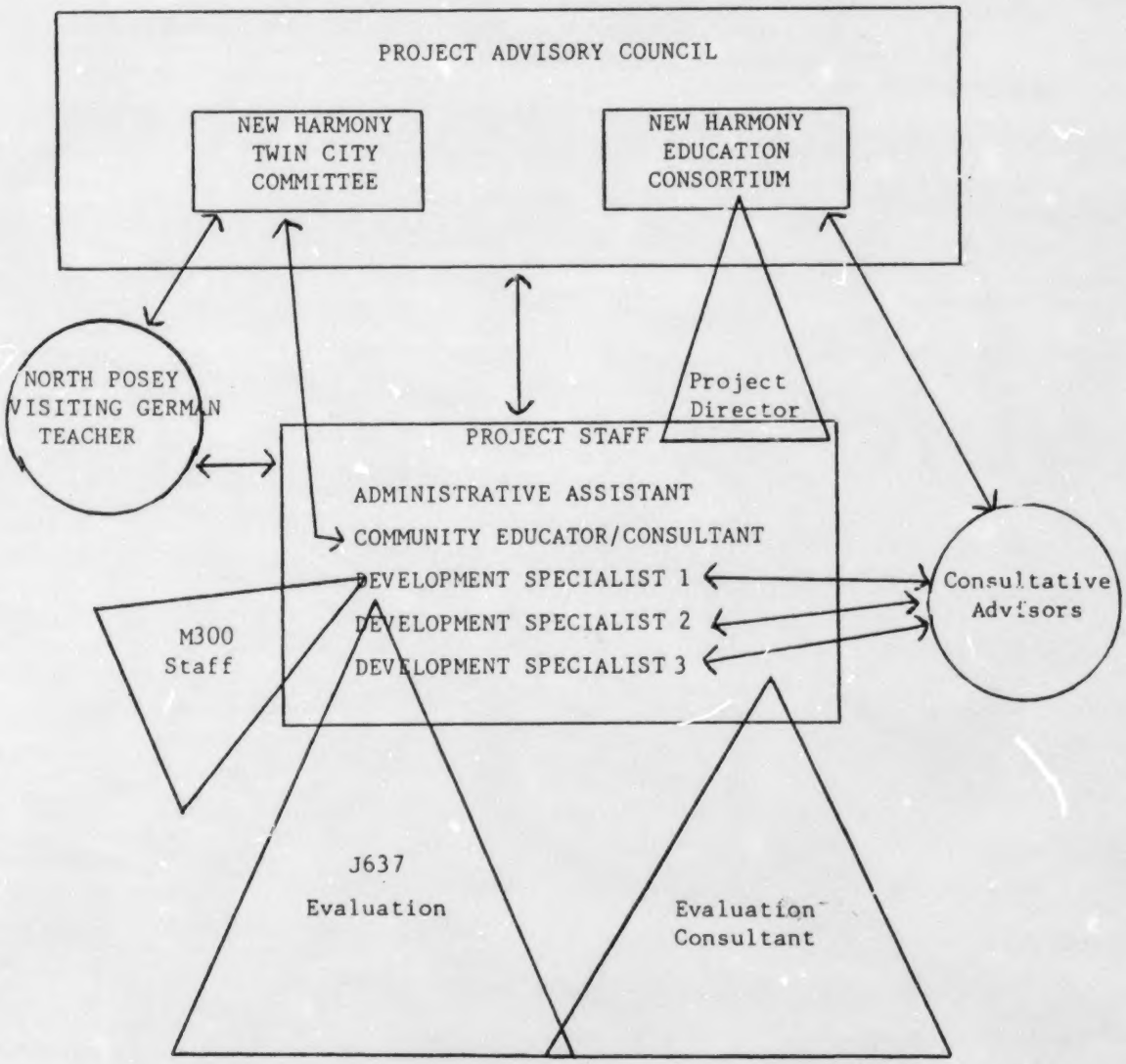
I wish to explore the relationship of this study to my growing awareness of enthnography and ethnographic studies as tools for curricularists in the theoretical and practical world of planning for intentional learnings.

In the New Harmony setting we found a community that was at least primed for lifelong learning. Education, formal and informal, has long, strong roots there. But at the same time the local community is a part of a larger regional community that does not value education highly, especially formal education. More critically, the area of concern (ethnicity) and the purposes of model building the project

Figure 2

Individual and Group Relationships on the

Ethnic Heritage Studies Project



was designed to pursue, were external constructs and interests representing value positions not high on the community's list of priorities. In the study an external assumption was being imposed, namely that members of small communities are unaware of their ethnic roots at a time when ethnic sensitivity is desirable. Secondly, it was assumed that an appropriate approach to awakening ethnic awareness was to start with an awakening of interest in and awareness of one's own community's ethnic heritage and ultimately move to an awareness and appreciation of one's place in the pluralistic society in which we live at this point in time.

In such a scenario there are a number of leaps of faith. Ethnographic research techniques and perspectives suggest ways in which curricularists might achieve a firmer grounding for their theoretical constructions. Spradley suggests that "ethnography offers all of us the chance to step outside our narrow cultural backgrounds, to set aside our socially inherited ethnocentrism, if only for a brief period, and to apprehend the world from the viewpoint of other human beings who live by different meaning systems."[5]

A fundamental assumption of this research was that mid-America does not usually have a sense of unique ethnic identity. In so far as mid-Americans identify themselves as ethnics it is usually as Americans. On the basis of my very limited study I continue to believe this to be true. However, I am sensitive to the charge that I do not know in any detail what it means from the perspective of the mid-American to be American and why those holding to this view tend to reject efforts to make them sensitive to other ethnic diversity.

"In our complex society the need for understanding how other people see their experience has never been greater."[6] We frequently forget that the majority or main stream culture may be as poorly understood as the minority culture. Any effort to build bridges by means of education requires a firmer foundation. "Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people",[7] according to Spradley. This suggests that even at the point of formulating assumptions we need to ground them in the experience of those with whom we are working. Curricularists need to go beyond studying the community and its components in a semi-detached manner as observers of the life about them or even as participant observers and learn to listen attentively to the voices of those they seek to educate and serve.

We have long recognized that learning is a personal act that the educator can facilitate by setting the stage and pointing the way. Ultimately, the step from ignorance or lack of understanding to increased perception and knowing is a personal act. It is akin to what Smith has called interpretive understanding. The curricularist must come closer to being in touch with, empathizing with, and knowing the reality of the learner. We can not be satisfied by superficial consultation with leaders of the community or selected representatives who lead us to think we have involved the community sufficiently and that we know the community. Limited knowledge of the community may lead to "seeing through a glass darkly". As a result, the curricula we help to build may lack relevance, not only in terms of inappropriateness of materials and strategies, but

the goals themselves may be perceived as unimportant. incomprehensible or ill-directed. When such is the case. the task of the curricularist must become one of clarifying the goal or developing acceptance of the goal before trying to achieve the learnings related to it. For example, in our study of New Harmony we very carefully identified the major institutions within the community that intersected the activities of the project and the project staff. As a result. a pictorial presentation provided an heuristic device that revealed a clustering of relationships and intersections of activities that were unexpected. (See Figure 3.) While we were aiming to place major emphasis on community involvement and community education outside the formal school setting. the schools were found to be central to nearly all the educational activities (even those outside the formal structure) and required more attention than had been planned. This suggested once more that superficial analysis of settings and the relationship of people in the settings or unexamined assumptions or inappropriate goals may easily lead us to misplaced emphases and unwarranted foundations for curriculum building.

Another example relates to a major learning. if not major finding. of the study. While the staff was engaged in a low level study of the community. both as setting and as subjects in a model building process (See Figure 4 for a graphic presentation of the model), it became obvious that we were also subjects in the unfolding drama. Our actions, reactions. perceptions and decisions were part of the evolving community of New Harmony and had a strong influence on events and relationships while we were there. Any act of curriculum

Figure 3

Community Institutions and Projects in Relationship
to the Ethnic Heritage Studies Project

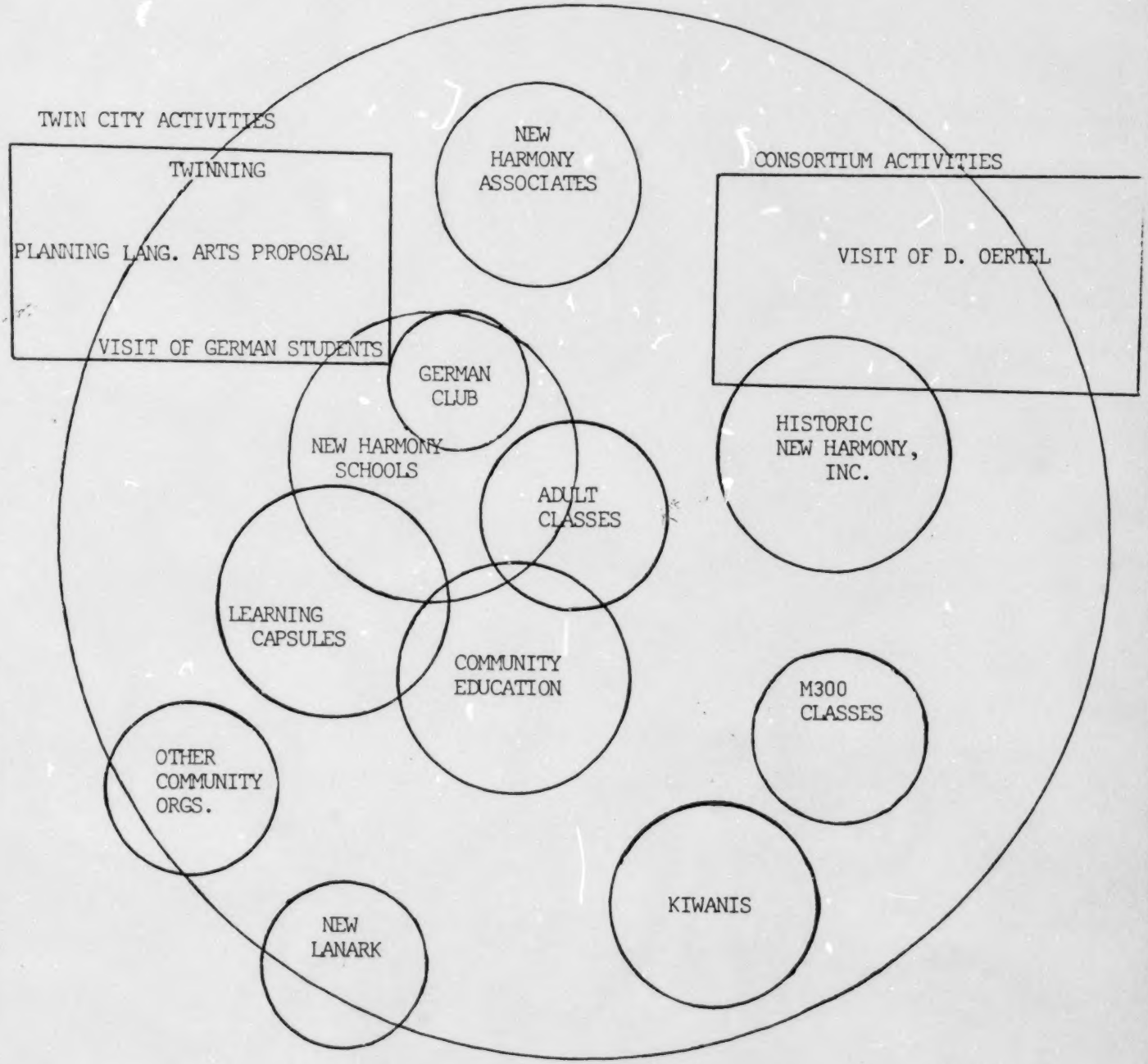
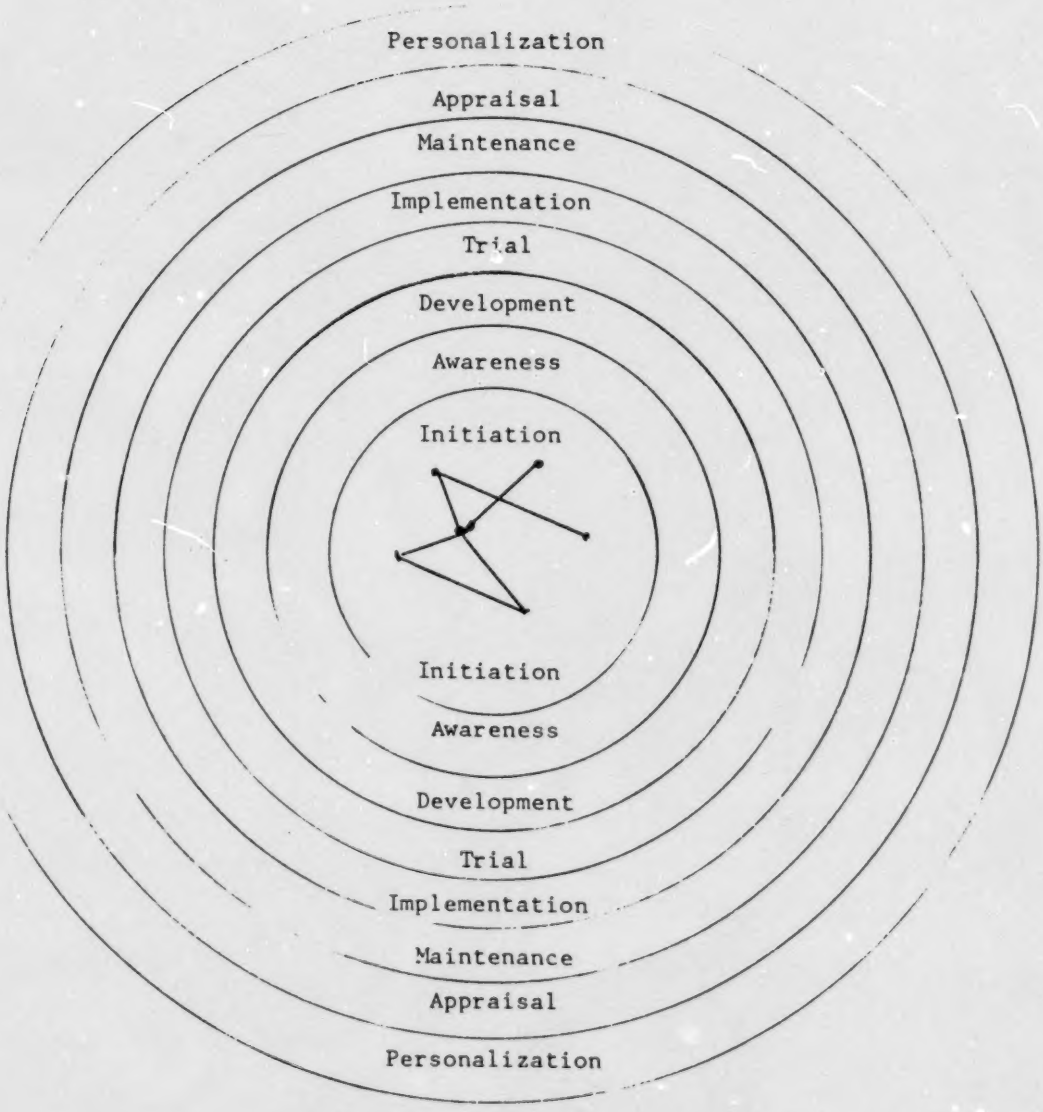


Figure 4

Stages in the Development of
Ethnic Heritage Projects



planning is an act of intervention in someone's already functioning setting. Therefore. it becomes necessary to look at one's self and take ownership of one's own ideas and actions. whether the outcome of the interaction is positive or negative. We were assisted in this process by using an evaluator who was able to apply ethnographic interview techniques and reveal to us our role in the community. While not resolving issues and problems confronted by the staff. the method made clear the nature of the issues and made their resolution possible.

Uses of Ethnographic Tools in Curriculum

Ethnographic tools, no less than the methodologies of other disciplines, are legitimate aids and processes for curriculum developers. The particular applications may be extensive. probably only limited by our individual creativity as educators. However. I would suggest three particular uses of appropriate ethnographic methodology to increase understanding of communities as resources--both as settings and as subjects in the world of curriculum building.

First, they may be used to study the community in which curriculum development is to take place. Too little is known in depth about the settings in which we practice the art of curriculum building.

Second, they may be used as the content of the curriculum. as information and skills to be developed. as a perspective to be realized, and as part of the student's knowledge base. Development of skill in learning from others is critical to lifelong learning. ethnic awareness. and global perceptivity.

Third, they may be used as instructional strategies for treating concepts, units or other aspects of the curriculum as they relate to

understanding such concepts as community and culture. Having achieved a modicum of understanding of the concepts and skills involved in ethnographic study. the opportunity to use the methodology is indispensible to retention and provides an additional vehicle for learning.

For example. the twinning relationship between Iptingen and New Harmony and the resulting student exchanges presents an unusual opportunity for initial involvement of the students in abbreviated efforts at various kinds of ethnographic fieldwork. Since the students have limited time within the host community. preparation for the visit and home stay might include familiarization with some of the methodologies of sociological and anthropological research. Such an approach could sharpen the student's ability to observe. identify. and record features of the setting and analyze the findings. Prior readings in appropriate works such as Moos and Brownstein's Environment and Utopia.[9] Barker and Schoggen's Qualities of Community Life.[10] Johnson's Doing Field Research.[11] Willis' Learning to Labour.[12] and Spradley's The Ethnographic Interview[13] might be used to acquaint the students with tools for systematic data gathering that would enrich their visits. At the sametime. these methodologies used in their home communities could provide a fresh perspective on a too familiar scene and provide a framework for raising questions and sharing data when students return from their exchange visits.

I have tried to suggest that ethnographic research methodologies can be used as instructional tools. components of the content of

curriculum, and as a means to fuller understanding of the communities in which we function. Wise interpretation of the collected data provide foundations for determining goals, perceptions and value structures that we may have selected to modify or assault through planned intervention. Finally, the tools may serve as mirrors to help us see ourselves in the process.

FOOTNOTES

1. Alex Heard. "Urban Bias' Said to Undermine Programs in Rural Areas." Education Week. October 6. 1982. 7.

2. Wilma S. Longstreet. Aspects of Ethnicity. New York: Teachers College Press. 1978. 19. "...that portion of cultural development that occurs before the individual is in complete command of his or her abstract intellectual powers and that is formed primarily through the individual's early contacts with family. neighborhoods. individual's friends. teachers and others as well as with his or her immediate environment of the home and neighborhood."

3. Robert G. Hanvey. An Attainable Global Perspective. New York: Center for War/Peace Studies. 1975.

4. James A. Banks. Multiethnic Education: Theory and Practice. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Inc., 1981. 28.

5. James P. Spradley. The Ethnographic Interview. New York: Holt. Rinehart and Winston. 1979. v.

6. Ibid.. iv.

7. Ibid.. 3.

8. John K. Smith. "Quantitative Versus Qualitative Research: An Attempt to Clarify the Issue". Educational Research. Volume 12. No. 3. (March 1983). 7.

9. Rudolf Moos and Robert Brownstein. Environment and Utopia. New York: Plenum Press. 1977.

10. Roger G. Barker and Phil Schoggen. Qualities of Community Life. Washington: Jossey-Bass Publisher, 1973.

11. John M. Johnson. Doing Field Research. New York: The Free Press. 1975.

12. Paul Willis. Learning to Labour. Westmead. Farnborough. Hants. England: Saxon House. 1978.

13. Spradley. op. cit.